



Bosnia and Herzegovina—Islamic Revival, International Advocacy Networks and Islamic Terrorism

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Introduction

The disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, the reemergence of several new ethnically divided states, and the demise of communist ideology opened up new opportunities and led to the emergence of a public space vacuum in most of the Balkan states. These changes allowed for new influences and the possibility of resuming the Balkans' historical role as a gateway for transmission of ideas, values, and resources from the Middle East. Recently, the most pressing concern has been the potential of Islamic activism as a transnational social movement and the global spread of Islamic terrorist networks.^[1] In the past decade and a half, one of the newly emerged states, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), has drawn considerable attention and interest. In a sense, it has become a testing ground for the employment of conceptual categories from social movement theory (SMT).

The goal of this paper is to explore the issues of Islamic revival and the possible establishment of a support base for Islamic terrorism due to an Islamic transnational social movement (TSM) by using empirical analysis of Bosnia and Herzegovina's historic development. This paper will focus on two fundamental questions: Do the Islamic revival and the spread of international Islamic advocacy network necessary constitute the initial phase for the spread of Islamic activism as a social movement (SM)? If not, how should we interpret this revival, under what conditions it can transform into a SM, and what are the possible connections and interrelations with Islamic transnational advocacy networks (TAN) and Islamic terrorism?

In order to answer these questions I will first make a brief historical outline of the emergence and development of Islam as religion in relation to the emergence of Muslim and Bosnian identity. Second, I will analyze the issue of contemporary Islamic revival and re-Islamization of BiH with several cross-historical references underlying the unique situation on the ground. Finally, I will examine perspectives for the emergence of Islamism as a SM in BiH, the role of Islamic international advocacy networks and possible interrelations with Islamic terrorism.

This paper offers five preliminary conclusions. First, an Islamic revival as part of the overall religious revival after 1992 has been on the rise in Bosnia. Though this revival is hard to measure,

evidently the influence of TAN and radical Islamic groups continued to grow despite the end of 1992 to 1995 internecine war. One of the interesting practical implications of that is the established “modus vivendi” between IZ (*Islamska Zajednica*/Islamic Community) and radical Islamic groups.[2]

Second, Bosnia in the 1990s was in the unique situation of having the political and mobilizing structures in place for the creation of an Islamic state. Nevertheless, it lacked the cultural framings around which to mobilize social support and the context to develop strong Islamic social movement. Islam was used more in nationalist context rather than as a pervasive issue that should transform the society.

Third, Bosnia is currently straddling the liberal religious tradition, mainly in Sarajevo, and the advent of more conservative and radical Islam in the rural impoverished areas of the country. Fourth, future developments might depend on the process of refugee return, Bosnian integration in the EU, and—on a great scale—the scope and efficacy of the counter-terrorism (CT) measures which might reignite or soothe the radical Islamic sentiments in the country. Fifth and last, the process of Islamic revival and the spread of Islamic advocacy network are not unique to Bosnia. One can observe the same developments in Albania, Sandzak[3], Macedonia, Kosovo, Bulgaria, and Greece.

There are two caveats to those preliminary conclusions. First, there is a scarcity of available data. A reliable census has not been conducted since 1991 and reliable statistics on the precise membership of different religious groups remain unavailable.[4] Second, as the Dayton Accords created the independent state of BiH it also created two multiethnic constituent entities within the state: The Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (the Federation) and the Republika Srpska (RS); this paper will deal more with the latter than with the former. Nevertheless, the peace and stability of Bosnia are directly correlated to the future of both entities—an issue that will be addresses in the final section.

Bosnia and Islam—the Building of Bosnian Muslim Identity

To explore the prospects of Islamic activism as a SM in BiH and to make a predictive analysis about future developments, it is imperative to view the process of Islamic revival in the context of historical evolution and building of Bosnian Muslim national identity. Bosnia and Herzegovina marks the western expansion of the boundaries of the Muslim world. In contrast to Western Europe the Muslim population is largely indigenous. The Bosnians entered Islam in the middle of 15th century en masse—the only example of a near-total acceptance of the Muslim religion in the Balkans. Nevertheless, the evolution of national identity in BiH shares many similar characteristics with that of Serbs and Croats, “but it is distinguished from them by the significance of the religious [Muslim] factor.”[5]

Thus, for the past 150 years, Bosnian Muslim national identity was forged using the “foreign threat frame” in the context of the hostile environment imposed by the neighboring Croats and Serbs. In this respect, “Bosnian Muslim identity cannot be fully understood with reference to Islam only, but has to be considered in terms of a specific Bosnian dimension, namely religious heterogeneity.”[6] Though both Serbian and Croatian ethnoreligious extremists and national policy did not support Bosnian national self-affirmation until the late 1960s,[7] the breaking point for the Muslims in ex-Yugoslavia was 1971, when the then national census offered them the opportunity to declare themselves “Muslim in the national sense.” Thus, this confusion made many believe that Islam was a nationality or a nation.[8]

The Bosnian Muslims throughout the 20th century were not cut off from the great changes that swept over the greater Islamic world. Even in the beginning of the 21st century in the case of the Muslim population of contemporary BiH we can see what Tarrow (1998) terms as “cross-border

diffusion[9]—the communication of movement ideas, forms of organization, or challenges to similar targets from one center of contention [Egypt] to another.” In addition, during the communist rule in former Yugoslavia, the IZ, a structure run by ulemas that was the official religious intermediary with the government, assumed responsibility for the mosques and madrassas of Sarajevo. Due to IZ efforts and favoritism of the pan-Islamist faction repressed in the late 1940s, a new generation of Islamist intellectuals surfaced in the 1970s.[10] In this respect, it is important that in addition to the “external threat” and “cross-border diffusion” mobilizing factors, two other points pertinent to the emergence of Bosnian Muslim identity be added. First, until 1992, Muslims were the only Yugoslav nation without a territory of their own; and second, the newly emerging intelligentsia came from the same social origins as the Muslim brothers and it was gaining momentum when the Muslim population of Bosnia was increasing very rapidly.[11]

The 1992 to 1995 war was the watershed event that led to the affirmation and mobilization of Muslim identity. It is also crucial for understanding the link among Islamism, national identity, and violence. As a militant ideology, Islamism has often thrived in conditions of strife, whether internal civil conflict or external war.[12] The 1992 to 1995 war was not a religious conflict, though it led to the ethnic group identification “very closely with distinct religions and religious/cultural traditions, including the predominantly Muslim Bošniaks, Catholic Croats, and Orthodox Serbs.[13] Indeed, the sole establishment and survival of the country was based on the reification and resurrection of the Islamic identity which was tied irreversibly with Bošniak nation, making the process of Islamic revivalism inseparable from the affirmation of Muslim national identity.

Islamic Revivalism and the Spread of TAN in BiH in the 1990s

The issue of Islamic revivalism in BiH is hard to measure as it can be easily confused with the spread of the international advocacy network. Here, *Islamic revival* will be viewed as:

1. The spread of the institutions of Islam as general, such as mosques, ulama, Islamic relief foundations, charities and NGOs, religious schools;
2. The Islamic proselytisation, in the form of Islamic literature, audio and video tapes, radio and TV, printed media; and
3. The growth of religiosity in society as a whole.

The spread of Islamic religious institutions such as mosques, relief foundations, NGOs, and charities boomed during the 1990s and only started to slow down after 9/11 due to the undertaken counterterrorist (CT) measures. In addition to the local, there are more than 250 religious humanitarian organizations in Bosnia emanating from the Middle East and Europe.[14] Before 1992, Sufis were successful propagators of Islam due to their accommodation of some local customs and practices. During the recent war many Sufis were actively engaged in jihad and today some are active in inviting non-Muslims to Islam. Sufi orders are unevenly spread in Bosnia, mainly in central Bosnia (Travnik, Fojnica, Kiseljak, Visoko, Zenica), and the valley of Neretva river (Mostar, Blagaj). Since 1992, in addition to the local orders, the main supporters of Salafi ideas were the following relief agencies—High Saudi Committee, Al-Haramain Foundation, and the Society for the Revival of Islamic Heritage (Jam‘iyyat Ihya’ al-Turah al-Islami). Among Bosnian organizations those are Active Islamic Youth (AIY), Furqan (closed down on December 31, 2002), Balkan Center u Zenici (for a short period), and Centre for the Affirmation of Islamic Sciences. The importance of these charities has been pivotal for the local populace as the Grand Mufti of Bosnia Mustafa Cengic pointed out in an interview in 2002: “Without them we could not survive.”[15]

Of about 1400 destroyed mosques during the war, now fifty to sixty have been rebuilt, both in urban and rural areas, mostly with money provided through the foreign relief foundations. Nevertheless, the overall control lies with IC. In 1999 it controlled 946 mosques and 636 *masjids*, while 258 mosques and 112 *masjids* were under construction. The IC employed 1,119 persons as

imams, *mu'allims* and *khatibs*.^[16] Besides relief agencies and *mujahidun*, another, in the long run perhaps the most important vehicle for the transmission of reformist ideas from the Middle East to Bosnia has been students. Today the number of Bosnian graduates of Islamic studies outside the country equals the number of graduates from the Faculty of Islamic Studies. Currently, there are about a hundred Bosnian students of Islam in Saudi Arabia, about sixty in Syria, forty in Egypt, thirty-five in Jordan, thirty in Iran, ten in Pakistan, ten in Turkey, and about twenty in Malaysia. Although many of these students adopt Salafi ideas, others do not and they easily find their place in the IC upon return to the country.^[17] The IC today employs some fifteen Ph. D. holders, fifteen, MA holders, and over 500 graduates from different Islamic and secular faculties in and outside the country. Its educational system consists of six *madrasas* in Bosnia and two in Zagreb (Croatia) and Novi Pazar (Sandžak, Serbia) with some 1300 pupils, the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo and three academies for teacher training (Zenica, Biha, and N. Pazar) with some 800 students. As of today Islamic education is provided in 1405 *maktabs* (elementary informal religious schools) for 60,000 regular pupils, six Islamic high schools (*madrasa*), two Islamic academies for training teachers of religious education in state schools, and the Faculty of Islamic Studies in Sarajevo.

After 1992, Bosnia was flooded with all kinds of Islamic ideas and literature. The IC and its institutions publish several fortnight newspapers and journals. The most widely circulated is "Preporod" (19,000), educational journal "Novi muallim" (2,800), while the oldest is the official herald of the IC, the bimonthly "Glasnik". Now, the second most widely read Islamic magazine (fortnightly) is "Saff", published by pro-salafi Active Islamic Youth (AIY) (9,000).

As we already established in the case of BiH the issue of religiosity cannot be viewed in isolation from the national identity formation. According to the 1985 census the religious believers are as follows: BiH seventeen percent, Macedonia nineteen percent, and Kosovo forty-four percent.^[18] In 2004 the percentage of the declared Muslims in BiH is forty percent. To some it is seventy-eight percent, but that denotes the Muslim population of Bosnia without that in RS. Despite the relevant scarcity of the existing data, we can safely make the preliminary conclusion that the observed Islamic revival in BiH has not necessarily translated into an Islamic social movement. Why is this not a social movement but Islamic revival? What is the role of Islamic TAN?

Political Opportunity, Cross Border Diffusion and Transnational Political Exchange

If we have to conceptualize the developments of the 1990s in BiH, inevitably we should consider a close look at the SDA (*Stranka Demokratske Akcije*—Party of Democratic Action). Definitely one might argue that it provided a political space and opportunity for the proselytisation of radical Islam in BiH. In this respect, the authority, moral, and social credit endowed to former president Alija Izetbegovic can be deemed as a vital pre-condition for the emergence of Islamism. As we already pointed out, the sole establishment and survival of the country was based on the reification and resurrection of the Islamic identity which was tied irreversibly with Bošniak nation. In addition, in the early years of the war (1992 to 1995) Izetbegovic and Party leadership were advocating "secular state and non-secular" society. Nevertheless, Islamism did not amount to a broadly based social movement. One possible reason is that it was mainly an elitist phenomenon and there was a political consensus in the country. There were no viable contention issues rather than the war that could have emulated into strong Islamic social movement. Thus, when analyzing BiH it is worth elaborating on the external factors and political isolation of the emerging state that led to close cross-border diffusion and transnational political exchange mainly with Iran and Saudi Arabia. Left without choice, Izetbegovic turned increasingly to Islamic states, including Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Libya for assistance. Arguably, Osama bin Laden visited him in Sarajevo in 1994 and sponsored some fighters from Arabic countries to fight on the Muslims' side in Bosnia.^[19]

In this respect, the situation was ripe for what Tarrow termed transnational political exchange[20] involving OIC states—the catalyst event that brought them together was the 1992 to 1995 war. This political exchange at the top level led to inevitable influx of forms of transnational advocacy networks (ranging from mujahedin to mosques and relief foundations) at the lower levels. In BiH there was no contention in the classical sense against the political authority, but there was enough against the common threat—the Serbs and initially the Croats. In this respect, diffusion accounts for the Islamic revivalism due to the proliferation of the advocacy networks but as we saw on the ground it was almost impossible for the Islamic activism to catch on the social networks. Actually, the only areas that do not fit into that pattern and could raise particular concerns in the future are the salafi dominated central regions of the country.

Mobilizing Structures, Cultural Framings and Collective Action

According to Doug MacAdam, et al., the mobilizing structures and framing processes mediate the effects of political opportunities.[21] Again, the classical SMT defines mobilizing structures as “those collective vehicles, informal as well as formal, through which people mobilize and engage in collective action.”[22] On the other hand, “a transnational advocacy network includes those relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and a dense exchange of information and services.”[23] The empirical data presented so far shows that as far as the political elite in Bosnia hijacked pan-Islamism, it is hard to find any bases for contentious politics within Bosnian domestic society. In this respect, it seems more adequate to view the existing Islamic charities, relief foundations, NGOs, and mosque network as a form of Islamic transnational advocacy network that profit from international agencies and Middle Eastern (primarily Saudi Arabian) governments or organizations.[24] Nevertheless, there is evidence of some organizational dynamics on the ground—intense networking and growing in number of certain Islamic groups—though it is far away from the dynamics of collective action. One would argue that this dynamic is still in the ferment of the TAN and it would be premature to be linked to the emergence of any indigenous social movement. Nevertheless, we should not lose sight of possible further developments as far as the newly built mosques, relief foundations, and other Islamic institutions have the character of local forums that provide a lot of opportunities for Islamic mobilization, especially in the rural areas, where more readily usable frames for mobilizing support could be found.

These findings explaining the lack of Islamic movement in Bosnia beg further attention, particularly when assessing the lack of major viable Islamic frames. In this respect, it seems that the Bosnian nationalist movement, using mainly Muslim religion as a mobilizing frame and identity separator, led to the transfer of Islamic TAN which—despite the foreign financing—local and international networking has not been able to transform itself or spark large social Islamic social movements. Certainly, several exogenous factors should be taken into account—the United States and NATO presence, hardships to harmonize Islamic social teachings with the principles of secular European society, ethnic structure of the population, etc. Thus, Bosnia lacked the context to develop strong Islamic social movement. Islam was used more in nationalist context rather than as a pervasive issue that should transform the society. “While the re-islamization of the national identity is a partial and limited process, the converse one—that is the “nationalization” of Islam—has no exception.”.[25]

Nevertheless, the influence of TAN and radical Islamic groups continued to grow despite the end of the war. Even after 9/11 despite the closure of some of the relief foundations (Al Haramain, TWRA, etc.) and the modus vivendi between IZ and radical Islamic groups, there is some evidence of the growing support base for the radical Islamic organizations.

Transnational Advocacy Network and the Support Base for Islamic Terrorism

According to Bougarel (1999) in Bosnia, re-Islamization led to the transformation of the collective identity of the IZ without corresponding modifications in the individual behavior of its members.[26] For him, that led to rivalries and worsened internal conflicts within the Islamic Community, leading to the establishment of independent Islamic cultural centers and movements for re-Islamization, thereby endangering the monopoly hitherto enjoyed by the Islamic Community in the religious life of the Muslim Community.”[27] Nevertheless, the latest developments on the ground account for an emerging cooperation rather than increasing tensions. AIY and Furqan, major critics of IZ, seem to accept the overall authority of the IC while retaining the right to act independently. It is not a rare case now that the AIY and IC organize certain events together (usually lectures in mosques).[28]

After 9/11 there has been another interesting development. Though several of the humanitarian organizations in BiH were shut down (due to established connection with AQ),[29] there has also been an increase in activity by several radical Islamic groups. Two of these groups deserve more attention—Muslim Brotherhood and AIY. An offshoot of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood was established in the beginning of 2002 in Sarajevo and by now has been growing steadily. It remains an open issue whether it used the established charity network as an initial base. Worth noting is that it is targeting mainly families of Muslim returnees in the territory of Republika Srpska often in cooperation with the Bošniak humanitarian association Sedra.[30]

Another group, AIY, has been the symbol and catalyst of Islamic revival in Bosnia.[31] The AIY's national headquarters are in Zenica. Besides Sarajevo, the AIY's main strongholds are in central Bosnia. It was legally registered in 1995 and claims to have over 2000 members, mainly students.[32] In 2002 they were able to mount several demonstrations in Sarajevo against the deportation of six Algerians suspected of terrorist activities.[33]

These and other activities lead to the possible interconnection of the spread of Islamic transnational advocacy network and the emergence of a support base for Islamic terrorism. Certainly, in the cases of GIA in Algeria and Islamic Jihad in Egypt, the social movement mobilizing structures were used by AQ for recruiting, communication, financing, etc. Are we not witnessing the same phenomenon in regard to the Islamic transnational advocacy networks in Bosnia? All the empirical data presented here leans towards that conclusion. Certainly, in the case of BiH we see the ugly face of the growth and spread of Islamic TAN.

In this respect, I suggest that we have to look at the Islamic transnational advocacy networks from the opposite perspective. They are also dependent on foundation funding and support, though not from northern but southern (Middle Eastern) governments. In the case of BiH, though they do resemble a social movement, actually due to the historical, cultural, and contextual factors they were not able to amount to a social movement. Nevertheless, Islamic TAN has succeeded in tapping and augmenting the process of Islamic revivalism, though the latter has developed in the shadow of nationalist Islamic movement.

In addition, as far as Al Qaeda has penetrated the Islamic TAN in the beginning of the 1990s, the empirical data on the ground shows that their spread in Bosnia led not only to the sustained re-Islamization of the society but also to the creation of a considerable support base for Islamic terrorism on the Balkans.[34] In this case, the term support base (group) begs definition. According to Gurr support group is "any social segment—a communal group, faction, political tendency, or class—whose members seek a particular kind of political change.”[35] In this regard, Dr. Baylouny offers a broader definition of support base: “something more concrete, those connected and networked into the group, not necessarily members.”[36]

In the case of BiH another dimension can be added to the support base concept that dovetails with Dr. Baylouny's definition. What about support base, not only in terms of human capital but also as a form of tacit social support, financial support, illegal financial activities, free passage opportunities, passports, illegal arms trading, etc? This connotation is directly linked to

Menkhaus'[37] analysis about terrorist choosing weak rather than failed states. In this respect, the comment of U.S. Army Major General Virgil Packett, the NATO Commander of the multinational Stabilization Force in northeastern Bosnia that "with a 1400 kilometer border, Bosnia and Herzegovina was formerly a sanctuary for terrorism, but now it is a gateway for terrorism,"[38] only confirms current analysis.

Certainly, the case of the Islamic revival in BiH raises more questions and concerns for the future as more and more empirical data points to possible connection between the Madrid terrorist bombings and the established terror networks in the country. In this respect, further issues need to be clarified as similar developments are observed on a smaller regional case in other states on the Balkans—Albania, Kosovo, Macedonia, Bulgaria, and Greece.

In this respect, it is important to outline the possible future developments in Bosnia. In respect to the observed Islamic revival and proselytisation of Islamic TAN and the alleged links with Islamic terrorist networks, there are several areas of short and mid-term concerns. First, potential contentious issues and mobilizing frames could arise from the deepening differences between the rural and urban areas of the country, especially if the current unemployment rate stays high around forty percent.[39] It will hinge on the pace of EU integration of Bosnia and its ability to establish a sound practice of state-building.

Second, in direct connection with the first issue is the unsolved return-of-the-refugees problem. In worst case scenario three factors can interplay:

1. The 2002 elections that resulted in coming to power of the three main nationalistic parties;[40]
2. The worsened discrimination in some Bošniak-majority areas where more conservative Islamic communities reside and the growing religious sentiment among youth mixed with streak of nationalism resulting in targeting of religious communities; and
3. The targeting of the returnees by Radical Muslim organizations in the light of the RS authorities' reluctance to intervene to prevent the violent obstruction of efforts to rebuild many of the mosques.[41]

Third, the inadequacy and over-implementation of counterterrorism measures without respecting the local sentiments and taking into account the socio-cultural context of the situation on the ground, especially after 9/11. The end result could fuel pro-Islamic sentiments and mobilization frames that can be used by the Islamist. A practical example is the turnover to US of six Algerian nationals, subsequently transferred to Guantanamo Bay. In itself, this not only provoked public outraged, as noted above, but also "have made many Bosnians uneasy that all Muslims, themselves included, would be suspect in the war on terrorism.[42]

These issues open the door for other pertinent questions that require timely and effective response: How can we delineate between Islamic revival which goes along exclusively social lines and Islamic activism as a social movement that has political connotations? Can we theorize, based on our observations, that the process of Islamization is the first part of formation of Islamic activism as a social movement? This paper has only scratched the surface of current trends and developments. Nevertheless, though it is impossible to address in depth all the questions and issues, I think these trends point to some dynamics and processes which are contextually different from those developing in the Middle East but deserving further attention and investigation.

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